

Avondale Mills Project

Interviewer: Edward Akin

Interviewee: Edgar Carroll, at his home in Stevenson, AL

12/27/1980

A: This is an interview with Mr. Edgar Carroll, at his home in Stevenson on December the 27th, 1980. Mr. Carroll, the way I usually start these things out, to kind of get us going and get our minds off that machine down there is to, for you just to tell me what you know about where your family came from before they came to this area, and how they got here, if you happen to know that sort of thing.

C: Well, on my father's side, there's very little known about his father. He was raised an orphan boy, and as far as we know, he was raised out here on Sand Mountain by a family of the name of Joelton. And my grandmother, she was a Joelton. On my mother's side, her folks came from Texas here. My grandmother was a Maxwell. Of course, my grandfather was George Reeves—G.W. Reeves. And just that they came from Texas is about all we know about them.

A: That's rather unusual. Most people, you know, would come from Georgia or the Carolinas. Do you know about when the family settled here?

C: No, no. I don't know the date.

A: But it was some time before you and Ruby were born.

C: Oh, yes. They were living here at the time my mother and father were married. And I don't know that date either.

A: Now, do you know what—you said they were farming at the time. Do you know where around here? What farm or what area?

C: Well, my grandfather owned a place between here and the steam plant. Uh, nor'west of Jim Ruther's place now, I guess. And my grandfather Carroll was a railroad worker. He worked on railroads. He had a section on railroads here that, with a crew of men, [he] kept up.

A: Yeah, now you had said that your dad was both a preacher and a farmer. About what size was the farm that he worked?

C: Well, he owned eighty acres where the steam plant is now. And he owned forty acres between here and the steam plant. And _____ (??) family owns that place now. 'Course, the eighty acres is where the steam plant is the government took it. And that is, 'course, what he owned. Other than farming, he had a saw mill. He ran a saw mill and had well _____ (??). He done several companies _____ (??) run this store down here. He built this store.

A: He started that.

C: Yes, and ran it 'til, well, 'til he died.

A: Yeah. Now your brother William worked there at the store for a while, didn't he?

C: Yes, after—

A: What happened to—

C: After Father died, why, J.T.—he was the baby boy—was at home at that time, and he went into the Army. William took over the farm. After they moved here when the store is now, he bought one hundred and twenty acres that J.T. owns now out here. And William came into—he was working for TVA at the time and he came with J.T. in order to take over the farm. 'Course, it's where he had his accident and got burned in the store. He ran in the store one night to get some tractor fuel, bringing out of the engine room or the grist mill—which was in the back of the store—and he spilled this fuel on him and in the meantime the lantern that he was carrying ignited the fuel and he was burned so severely that he didn't recover. He died.

A: Now William was _____ (??)'s husband.

C: Yes, sir. Lee and Terrell's father.

A: Yeah. Now, what was it like, how much can you recall about the store itself back in that day? Was it kind of like the crossroads general store?

C: Yes. He sold some hardware, groceries, gasoline, oil—of course—and ran the grist mill, which was part of the store.

A: Now, was the grist mill just strictly corn?

C: Yeah, just the corn.

A: So farmers would come in and—what?—would they bring their own corn and go grind it?

C: On Saturday. We just run the mill only on Saturdays. And, uh, they began coming in early Saturday morning. Sometimes, we'd grind 'til late in the night before we'd get ground out.

A: Now did your dad start the store as you were a child or had he already started it?

C: No, he started it after I was—well, it was 1925 that he started the store. And, 'course, I was born in 1909 _____. I was fourteen years old then.

A: Now, you said your dad was also a Christian Advent minister.

C: Yeah, Christian minister.

A: And Christian, now, is that the same thing as what we call Seventh Day Adventist? Or was that a different—

C: No, their teaching is similar to some respect—in some respects, but the Seventh Day Adventist, they hold Saturday as the day of worship, as the Sabbath, which is actually Saturday in the Sabbath. Uh, 'course, every other denomination uses the first day of the week, which was the day Christ rose. And, 'course, we do, too. Seventh Day Adventists, they hold their worship from sundown Friday evening to sundown Saturday evening.

A: So, briefly, what your belief system—

C: Well, uh, what—the way we got our name, we were first called Second Adventist Christians. We were one of the first—William Miller was one of the first to teach with any emphasis on the Second Coming of Christ. That everything depended on the Second Coming of Christ, the restoration of the kingdom and all those things. And now, that is part of the doctrine in all denominations, but back in the latter part of the 18th Century, William Miller started that.

A: Yeah, right. I'm familiar with him from reading American religious history.

C: Yeah. Well, he's the founder of that branch, Advent Christian Church.

A: Yeah, y'all were—it would have originally been called the Millerites.

C: Yeah. They were first called the Millerites.

A: Well, Mother and I had gotten into some discussion last night. She said, "I think they're the Seventh Day Adventists." And I said, "I've never heard of that." She said, "I think I'm right."

C: No, we take the first day of the week as the day of worship. Just like most of the other denominations, except the Seventh Day Adventists.

A: Okay, now I'm well aware of what the group is about. So, now when J.T. was born, he was born in Gadsden. Had—was this a revival, or had y'all moved?

C: No, from right after the war, I'll say in the latter part of the 1918, which November 11 was the Declaration of Independence was. But in the early part of 1919, why, there's three, four churches over there at _____ (??) that's close enough together that one minister could pastor all of them. And they called him to pastor that—those churches. Well, he rented out the place and we moved to Gadsden. WE hadn't built the store then. And, uh, in 1920, J.T. was born over there. We moved back here in 1921. And went back to farming on the old home place out here and, in the meantime, he bought this little piece Miss Edwards down here and built a house on it and a store. And it was in operation about '25.

A: Back to the store once again, did it function like most country stores at the time—that people would have to buy on credit 'til crops came in, that sort of thing?

C: Yes, he carried some farmers from spring 'til fall. But most of his trade was local trade, right around...

A: Right around this, the community.

C: But some of the larger farmers traded with him from spring to fall.

A: So most of his trade would have been cash or short term, rather than what we like down in Fackler, or some of the areas that are really out.

C: Yeah.

A: Now, I suppose you went to school here in Stevenson?

C: Yeah. [Loud noise in background covers most of his speech here] little country school out here in the ridges that we called _____ (??)

A: How many grades did it have?

C: They taught to seventh grade. From 7th on, I went to _____ (??)

A: What do you recall about the one-room school? How, I've always been interested with—I guess, what, about thirty/forty kids...

C: Yeah.

A: ...spread across seven grades, how the teacher managed to keep all of that going.

C: Well, I think the one-room school was a help in this way. We were all there together, and she started in the morning with the first grade, then the second and third right on up through to the seventh by dinner. Then after lunch, she started with the first grade again. You got to hear all that was going on in that school room, and a child would have to pick up some things that were geared to the grades on above him, reciting their lessons there—crowded schools, you know. And I think by the time you finished one grade, you'd already picked up _____ (??) it would be easier for you to carry on than it would have been if you hadn't been familiar with it. _____ (??) Some of the lower second and third grade students that had to add the arithmetic, had picked up enough by the time that they got to the arithmetic, they had a pretty good knowledge of it. So it wasn't a problem.

A: Yeah. Now, I imagine that a lot of the kids who went there from poorer families, farming families. What did they do about things like books and writing tablets and so forth?

C: Well, as I recall, most of the children that went there was able to buy books. _____ (??) sixth grade, you didn't have many books. But after you got to the fifth and especially the seventh grade, when you went to the seventh grade, you had an armful of books. You had spelling, arithmetic, geography, English, and all those things.

A: I'm not sure if we're picking up over this.

[TAPE CUT OFF]

A: Did you have one or two teachers that you especially recall during that time?

C: Well, Miss Ada Wallace was one of the teachers—very good teacher—and then we had one man teacher; his name was Bruce Hall. But he was a school teacher. Most of the teachers were—well back in those days—were dedicated to their work, did a good job.

A: Yeah. They'd almost have to be like that to take on that big a responsibility.

C: To teach in a country school like that, you had trustees of school but, they were there to tell if the teacher didn't do the job.

A: Now at the time, did y'all have a county-wide system where each school more or less, you know, ran itself?

C: Each school ran itself. I don't even know if they had a county superintendent of education.

A: Probably didn't. Now did most of these teachers—did they grow up in this area, or did the school board have to go out and...

C: These were local people. The Wallace, you know this farm up here where Lowell Peters lives now on that cross road, and Bruce Hall lived up here and got married to _____ (??). And—

A: Now, did most of them then finish high school and then start teaching or did they get a little teacher education?

C: I can't answer that. I don't know the extent to their education.

A: Yeah, I was just wondering, you know, how much they were able to get. And then from there, you went—of course—to Stevenson High School. Now the school you started out at Stevenson burned, didn't it? In the 30s?

C: _____ (??)

A: I was thinking that while Daddy was there as I recall it burned and they rebuilt it with WPA _____ (??). Now while you were at Stevenson, how did they do the teaching there? Did they have different teachers taught different subjects? Or one teacher taught all the subjects?

C: No, they had different teachers who taught different subjects because certain rooms were certain classes. Carried on similar to the way it is now. There may be some changes, but very few.

A: Did it serve about the same area that it does now, going down to Mud Creed and around this area?

C: Yeah.

A: Now, let's see. You were the second child of the family. Ruth was, Ruby was born, what year?

C: 1907.

A: And you were born 1909.

C: Right.

A: And then after you, Hubert and then William and—

C: And Holton?

A: And uh, so you—we've gotten you through school. That puts you in about 1926, I guess. Right? And so you started working on the farm, or did you go...

C: Down at the saw mill _____ (??) farming by the time I was through school, or by the time I quit school. I quit in the seventh grade. He _____ (??) grist mill, saw mill in the wilderness _____ (??)

A: What, did y'all just rent it? Or...

C: Rent it.

A: Now, did most of the farmers around here who didn't own their land—were they able to rent during this time, or was there already a lot of sharecropping?

C: Well, we rented to people that had their own stock. We sold ours _____ (??) And he rented to people that had their own stock _____ (??)

A: Now, what caused you to first go without them? Did —

C: Well, Daddy's health got bad and he slacked up some on his work. Uh, it took more than one to run the ____ (??) than what he had. We just more or less drifted off from it and I wanted to work for myself _____ (??) and he spent most of his time then just in the store. Now, he rented the other things out, or leased them out some _____ (??), the drill and the saw mill. Along about 1929, by the time that I married, he sold his drill and sold the saw mill and then all he had was the store.

A: And so—did you start work with the mill before Avondale bought it or after?

C: After.

A: Yeah, it had been closed, I think, for a short time.

C: Yes, it had been closed. I think Phil Timberlake owned it. Him and some other people sold it to Avondale. But I didn't go to work for them until after Avondale bought it from them.

A: Avondale had rented, I think, a couple of years. I think they started running in '30. And you had said that you started sometime in '32.

C: I think somewhere along in '32.

A: Now the interesting thing when we had talked about it yesterday that I called, that you had used the NRA as one of your landmark points. Why was NRA so significant?

C: Well, there was no way, no set way _____ (??) And I believe that I was making when I went to work with them about twenty or twenty-two, twenty-three cents an hour. Well, NRA come in. They pledged that minimum wage of thirty cents. And I can remember that very vividly because I got _____ (??)

A: Now, how many hours were you working before NRA?

C: Eight.

A: Eight a day.

C: Three eight-hour shifts.

A: Even before NRA?

C: Yeah.

A: That's interesting. Was it a five or six-day week?

C: Five.

A: So, y'all were already on a forty-hour week.

C: That's all we had, a forty-hour week.

A: That was unusual in the textile industry.

C: Yeah, but you had Saturday and Sunday off.

A: Now, you got that pay raise under NRA. Now Bragg Comer came up, what year did he start up here?

C: Well, I believe the car he bought was a '34 model.

A: So, that would have been right after he came up here.

C: Right. He bought that right after he came up here.

A: Now, as far as you can determine, what you say about the make-up of the folks who were working at Avondale Mill at the time? Did most of them tend to be local, or did they follow mill work?

C: Well, the people that actually did the _____ (??) were local people. Now supervisors and the—what we called “fixers” back then—that's the man that worked on the frames when they broked down and the card grinders, and the people like that usually were transferred in, already experienced people It takes some time to train a man to some of the work that they had in the mills. The reason I believe that

they did that that way. But we had some people come in here from _____ (??), Alabama and Sylacauga—places where it was more of a mill town than Stevenson was. This being the only mill here, why, probably one kind of card grinder would come here and stay two or three years and maybe he'd get an offer of a better job somewhere and move on. Well, they'd bring another one in. If they had to train one. But Avondale was good about trying to training their people. After they had been here, I'll say six or eight or ten years, why, they had people coming up and recruiting that they had trained. Now, Dick Ballard has been a—he started out as card grinder along about the time I went to work, working with the card grinders. He just retired last year from Avondale. He's been a foreman and they's several people like that.

A: And his son has done very well. Wallace.

C: Yeah, got a scholarship.

A: Yeah. Now one of the things—I'd already talked with Dick, and one of the things he pointed out during that time when he started—and I guess it was when you started, too—that when you first learned the job, you didn't get paid until you had learned it. Was that the case with you, too?

C: Right. See, I went to work in the picker room, I believe. That's where the bales are open and run through the pickers to make _____ (??) to go with the colors _____ (??). Now I found Avondale to be a company that—if you showed interest in your work and took interest in it, they'd give you that opportunity. And I, I advanced real well. I didn't stay in the opening room long 'til I was out at the carding room. And I wasn't out in the card room long 'til I was _____ (??). And I went from card runner to what they called a fixer. And then I went from the fixer to the overseer of the mill. And I believe I was only there from '32 'til the latter part of '35 when I _____ (??). But had made that many advances in those three, four, or five years. And if you showed an interest in your work with Avondale, and it's still that way today. They'll give you every opportunity.

A: I know you can't come up with exact dates, but about how long was it before you became the foreman?

C: Well, let's see, I went to work in '30 to '2 and stayed 'til '35. That's three years. About that. Maybe three and a half years. And I was foreman the last year I stayed there. I stayed at that two years. I went from the ground to the foreman's job.

A: Now, you had become a foreman before the '34 strike? Or right after?

C: I—I was—I was working in the grinding cards when they had the strike. I hadn't made foreman by that time.

A: Now, you're the first person who was actually working there during the strike period. What do you recall about the strike itself?

C: Well, the way I sized the thing up, the Comer people just didn't want the union. Uh, they shut the mill down and carried everybody to the ball field. Uh, Mr. Comer gave a talk. And he told them if they'd

forget about the union, says, "We'll give you—" I forget just what it was. A bulk? But [he] says, "WE pay you so much a bulk, what the union _____ (??) and every working condition the union gives the people, we will top that by so much." He told them just what but I can't recall all the working conditions and all the other things. They made every effort in the world to keep the union out. And the way I saw it, the thing was, and knowing the—the Comers like I do now—I didn't know too much about them then—they would have lived up to their promises.

A: Well, they have. And they're trying, they're still non-union.

C: They've got better working conditions there than the union has at other mills now.

A: But he did that probably early on in the summer when the UTW was—was involved around the nation in this sort of thing. Do you recall exactly when he had that meeting with the workers?

C: I can't put a date on that because there's nothing to indicate like the NRA was to establish a date.

A: But what I'm trying to figure out is, did that occur before the wild cat strike?

C: Yes.

A: Okay.

C: He seen it was coming. And then one time after, after they come out [and] struck, he called back and had another meeting with about the same reply that he had gave them the first time. But you know...

A: Yeah, now I know this from reading newspaper articles on this stuff, and so that Huntsville seemed to be the center of the union activity. And that some of the people from there, I think John Dean and a couple of other people had come up here to try to get the workers to close the mill down up there.

C: Right.

A: Can you—can you remember anything about how many of the workers were sympathetic with the union or anything like that?

C: No, I would be—I would say the majority was sympathetic with the union. Maybe fifty-five percent or sixty percent or something like that. Because I can recall—see, Hubert got injured in it, on a trip over to the ball field. They got to throwing rocks. One rock hit him right there, and hurt him pretty bad. He had a pretty good gash on him. And as well as I can picture it now, the majority of the crowd was sympathizers.

A: Yeah. And, uh, in talking with Dick, the company closed the mill down once the agitation began.

C: After they _____ (??)

A: That's what caused them to close. Okay, now we're getting the dates pretty much figured out. Uh, it stayed closed—do you recall how many weeks?

C: I don't remember how long it stayed closed?

A: I know at the time they closed it, folks around here thought that was it, that it was all over. And then some of the local community leaders guaranteed to Avondale that they could reopen the mill with no continuing troubles.

C: Yeah.

A: Do you recall who some of the local business leaders would have been who—

C: Well, I could mention a few names that I think had a hand in it. For instance, Judge Hogart, and he came in and Ernest Vance, but as to what part they took in it, I couldn't tell you.

A: But these would be the type of people who would be very concerned with it. Now, when y'all came back to work, were you still card grinding at the time?

C: Yes.

A: Now, I understand that before y'all got around, now this would have been long after you left, I guess, before the humidifiers, the stuff like that, the conditions within the plant were pretty rough, weren't they?

C: Right.

A: Do you recall some of the particulars?

C: No. You see, they hadn't put in any humidifiers when I left them. The lint in the mill was pretty bad. What all the humidifiers they had was mounted on the posts around, sprayed a little mist in the air.

A: More of a sprinkler system.

C: Yeah. But I—the three or four years I worked there, you'd get quite a bit of lint on you, but to the extent that you breathed it, I—I couldn't see where it hurt you. Lint is light and _____ (??)

A: In a place like Sylacauga or, say, down in the valley, the Chattahoochee Valley or up in the Carolinas where textile mills are dominant, mill workers tend to be looked down on, you know, "lint heads" and that sort of thing. Did y'all ever get that type of feeling around here?

C: Well, before the Comers bought it—I think that would be prevalent here. 'Course, the wages were worse than they was. The Comers give a raise, paid better scale than ____ (??) did, even when they first bought the mill. But you didn't have the opportunity to advance before the Comers bought it like you did after. And they got you—the type of people that followed the work then was the very poorest _____ (??). That picture changed, then, after the Comers bought it. Some of the higher people in Stevenson worked for the mills. The picture just changed 180 degrees.

A: Well, I had noticed that sort of thing. For instance, take a place like Sylacauga, mill folk very seldom would belong to the First Baptist Church, which is the—but I've noticed up here that several people who were mill folks belonged to the...

C: One that attracted a different type of people—the Comers began to build tennis courts, baseball diamonds, and do a little bit for their workers. And that attracted different people. We had boys they hired to come in here and play baseball that was—some of them was as far away as Chicago.

A: I was fixing to ask about that. I've been reading the *Avondale Sun* along. And most of the—of course, Stevenson, being so far from Birmingham at the time when they were headed there, you didn't get that much mill news from up here, but when you did, it was always about that baseball team. Do you have a feeling that some of the people were hired for their baseball abilities more than their mill work?

C: I believe it to be a fact. When Little Bragg was here, that baseball team was tops. I mean, he had a good baseball team; he went out and got people who could play baseball.

A: Yeah, I noticed.

C: And it attracted attention here in Stevenson. The society of the town would come out and watch the baseball games.

A: But it wasn't—like you were pointing out, it wasn't just local boys.

C: No.

A: They really went out and recruited.

C: He had a bunch of local boys here, but the Stewarts—they was three or four of them that played good baseball. Hubert played on a team and he had—he had a boy that he went... I believe he come from South Carolina, though, and the thing that stands out in my mind: his father and mother came here from South Carolina to watch him play baseball. And in that game, he hit a single, a double, a triple, and a home run. So things like that will stand out in your mind, now. That's the kind of people he had. He went out and got people.

A: And, of course, like you say, it was, was a means of really bringing the community and the mill together.

C: Bringing the mill up to the community level is what he was doing.

A: Now Bragg was only here, what, about four years?

C: Four or five years.

A: I guess he was still here, though.

C: Yes.

A: Now, you started out in the picker room, which I guess is mostly men working in that room.

C: Right.

A: Now, what about carding? Was it...

C: Well, it was all men.

A: That was still men.

C: The women didn't start until after you pass the drawing frames. They got the speeders and the intermediates and the spinning room, the twisters and the winders. Back where the cotton, the laps that you carried weighed forty-five pounds. They were pretty big and they were just too much manly work. The first part of the mill up past the drawing frames. Nowadays, they would go back there.

A: Well, having been away from mill work as long as you have, I'm surprised at home much of the—all these little things that you recall. Is it the sort of thing that once you got inside a mill, you tried to understand the total workings of it or—

C: Yes. There's a difference between everyday life and the inside of that mill. Now, they've got what you call "mill mathematics" that you've got, constants that you remember to work certain problems. In other words, for a twister, to give the cotton so much twist per turn, you see, you've got constants to figure your gears by. There's a lot to learn in—in the mill to be able to perform efficiently. You can't just take your everyday arithmetic and sit down and work out a gear change, you've got to know the constants you're using. Mill mathematics that they used to figure out the twist to give that yarn.

A: Now, from the way you are describing things, historians and other ivory tower people might need to do some re-thinking because, many times, textile work has been described as unskilled work, but from I'm getting from you, there's a great deal of skill involved in, especially in some of the jobs.

C: Well, that's true. The average person—if his IQ is past 100—could go in that mill and make a change on them frames to give you the right twist per inch or on the cards, to give you the right weight of cotton coming off of that to make a certain size yarn if you get him to the mill. But the mill man can, he can change the gears on that card and make that webbing of cotton that comes off of there the right weight that after it goes through the drawing frames, you draw it so much there, you're constantly drawing cotton to lay the fabrics parallel and knowing just how much to pull it in the drawing frames and then pull it again on your twisters. And, of course, the main pulling comes after you get it on the spinning frames. And you got to know how to do all that to come out with a certain weight of warp yarn to get it through the spinning. And the average person would be lost, totally lost. And that's the reason why I'm having to go in there and learn that mill mathematics and show them that we can make those changes all through the mill just as fast as you could go.

A: Now were there—were there major pay changes on each of these steps or just a small—

C: Yeah. Every time, every time you made an advance in the job, you got a pay raise.

A: So in that fairly short period of time, then, you saw your pay change dramatically by the time you—

C: I was drawing almost top wages for an overseer.

A: Do you recall what it was at that time?

C: I believe the top wage I drew there was \$37.50 a week. I'm not sure. See, that's thirty cents an hour. That \$240, ___ is ten, about \$15 a week was the average pay, you see. Well, I had more than doubled that, _____ (??) cents, well forty-two, well I won't say which, but I was right at _____ (??)

A: So the people who had made it, uh, did you call it—it was supervisor, right? The technical—

C: Overseer, they called them overseers. The _____ (??) overseers, spinning room overseer...

A: You were carding.

C: Carding overseer.

A: Now, as you point out, you and many of the others who moved into the overseer positions had come up through the mill. You had other members of the family working here _____ (??). Was this—what about what you might call the society in the mill?

C: Well, what do you mean by that?

A: Well, things like family relationships. Did people tend to have other members of the family working in the same area of the mill?

C: Yes, yes.

A: And then whenever a job would come available, they'd call the overseer and say, "Look, uh, my son or my daughter or somebody—"

C: It wasn't a—it wasn't looked down upon back then and in that mill. There's an overseer saying that his brother could handle a job, that they were perfectly willing for him to get him that job. 'Course, that doesn't work today. There were father and son teams all through the mill.

A: Like if you saw a good worker and that worker came and vouched for a relative, you would tend to—

C: ...to offer.

A: Yeah, try him out and see how—what about the training of some people when they would come into the mill cold, so to speak. How would you train them? Did you just assign a person to help teach them or how did that work?

C: Uh, you usually put him—if you were going to train him for a certain job, you would get him a job that wouldn't require full time. And the extra time that he had, he'd work with a man that he was going to try to learn the job. See, they had the—they had quite a few workers in that mill that didn't have

assigned jobs every day. The overseer would say, "Well, I want this job today, or that one." You could put one, job would work, and then you could pull off in _____ (??) so you don't make a major change on and off. You want him to get the experience of working that change, you put him with that kind of job, you see.

A: We're at the end of this side.

[END OF SIDE 2]

A: We were just starting to talk about the idea of training a person as they came on, and you had said that you just used them from job to job. And then what happens with the—

C: As he—as he could _____ (??) if you think he can, is beginning to pick it up to where he can make the change, if you just got a speed gear to change, why you'd give him a job and let him change it. And as he picked it up, why you could just work him right in, you see, and pretty soon, he's doing a full job.

A: Now what, uh, when you were working, what shift were you on?

C: I was on the day shift.

A: On the day—the day turn. Had they gone to three shifts by the time you had left, or...

C: Yeah. Now parts of the mill were on three shifts when I went there. The spinning room—they never did shut it down. It run three shifts. The opening room where I worked, though, I made enough laps _____ (??) for the cards in one shift to run on three shifts and it didn't have to. But most of the mill was running three shifts when I went there. Part of it would run two shifts. In other words, the winders could wind in two shifts what the spinning room would produce at one shift—I mean three shifts.

A: Yeah. And so you were over the day turn.

C: Yeah.

A: And as you mentioned yesterday, that that brought on your demise.

C: Right. That evening shift man was named McElroy, Henry McElroy. And he was brought in here from Pitman, Georgia. And he was—I'd say—I was maybe twenty-five, twenty-six, seven years old somewhere along there, and he was in his thirties, thirty-five maybe and he felt like he'd been in the mill work all his life and he felt like he should have the day shift and he needed that shift. Well, Jack Perkle was—no, take that back. Uh, Mr. Hanes was the superintendent and I spoke to him about it. I said, "Mr. Hanes, it seems like there's a little envy between the evening shift foreman the overseer and me." He says, "Carroll, I think it'll work itself out. Just go ahead and make the best of it." And I—on several occasions, saw him taking McElroy into the office, talking to him. And I assumed that before ____ (??) Well, Dick Ballard was the card grinder on my shift and the way we worked that card grinding, the card—the card that we put the grinders on today, his grinder would set that card up, put it in production tonight and

start another to grind it for us to put up in the morning. Well, on this particular day, he had a good card grinder, but it was just an oversight on him. He left the back feed row that pulls the cotton into the card, he left it un-weighted. It had two weights on it. And the card free to just jerk the cotton in there in lumps. And it bent the wire down on the card. You've seen the hand wires, I'm sure.

A: Yeah, right.

C: And, uh, the revolving card is made the same way. And, uh, when Dick found it, he come told me and I went and looked at the card. He said, "This jerks lumps of cotton in there and bent the wire down on that card. We're going to have to grind it again." I said, "Well, Dick, just put that one back in production over there and you've got cut out to grind and grind this one again." Well, when McElroy came in that evening, I was standing back in the card room at the back end of the mill, and Dick was working on a card, there pretty close to me, and Roebuck, Stewart was running drawer frames right up at the end of the card room and I said, "Mac, uh (this is a nicer way of talking) your card grinder forgot to weight his feed row last night and the card jerked quite a bit of cotton in it and bent the wire down and we've ground it again, instead of grinding another one." He said, "It's a damn lie." Well, when he did, I knocked him about as far as [coughs and laughs] and I went walking up off toward the office. I seen Roebuck Stewart coming down the aisle toward me and he says, "You better watch what you're doing." Says, "That feller'll get up, hit you over the head with something." I said, "I think he's already took care of." I didn't care. Well, I went over to the office and told Mr. Hanks what I'd done. Well, he sent me and Mac both off for that day. His nose was bled all over his shirt. He sent us home, and we went back over to the mill the next day, and he kind of him hawed around about it and I said, "Mr. Hanes, I've got another job _____ (??) I've been thinking pretty strong about taking it anyways. If there's going to be any change made, I'll just check out." Well, he said he's been talking to some people, some other people, and says, "They're wanting to make a change." I said, "Okay. That's fine with me. I'll just go on home." And I went to work for TVA two weeks later. So that's how I left Avondale. But that—I don't usually fly off the handle that way, but when he said—and I had all the confidence in the world in Dick Ballard, and I seen the card myself, and when he said, "It's a damn lie." I just flew off and hit him.

A: Yeah. Well, now, you had said that it had been building up before that. What were some of the indications you had?

C: Everything. Everything that he could find on me and Dick. Our card _____ (??) the operation of the cards, he'd run to the office with it. He was really picking at us.

A: He was after that first shift!

C: Yeah. Well, he got it!

A: Yeah. So, they did switch him over to first after that. How long did he stay?

C: He stayed here about eight years that and went somewhere else. Most of those people that was brought in didn't stay too long. They'd drift on out. They's planning to get a better job.

A: Now, about how many of the people—the skilled personnel—was Avondale pulled in here from its own system? I get a feeling on into the '30s that they would bring in from Sylacauga and other places.

C: Yeah. Well, some of them were, but I had the feeling—and still do—that the people that Avondale had it to other the mills had bought homes and, more or less, were stationary, and they didn't agitate 'em too much. They didn't, say, want you to go anyway. If one of 'em wanted to move, why, I guess they could move, but I don't think they pushed a man that way. They let me—they didn't interfere with his home life, in other words. He—he...

A: Now, at the time that you were working, I understand had about, what, twenty-four homes?

C: Yeah, something like that.

A: Now, especially at Sylacauga, Alexander City, Pell City—some of their other locations, I know that they really encouraged and, in fact, gave workers interest-free loans to buy land or to buy a house. Did any of that occur at here that you know of?

C: Not that I know of. Now, after they sold—began selling the village here—the mill hands had preference and they could buy them on credit.

A: I knew that occurred for the village itself, but back in the '30s, they were doing—they were doing it, like, for farmers and stuff.

C: I don't know of any other happening here.

A: Yeah.

C: It could be, and I didn't know about it.

A: One of the reasons that I've selected Stevenson for this study was it's so far removed from what we might call the center of the textile industry. And I was interested in seeing a situation that was not typical. That... that was in a small community, a fairly small mill by textile standards. Did—I can understand the relationship being good with the Comers and that sort of thing, but one of the things I was trying to determine was how much did the Stevenson Mill feel a part of the Avondale system itself and how much did it see itself as somewhat different.

C: Well, I think that by the time I went to work there, I know that by the time I had left, uh, Avondale at Stevenson felt pretty much a part of the Avondale system because of the fact that they participated in the summer vacation at Panama City. They were carried down there. And the fact that Bragg did what he did for the baseball, tennis, basketball. Uh, the fact that they participated in the school, gave money to the school, the curtain at Stevenson High School was donated by the mill.

A: Really?

C: Yeah.

A: I didn't know that.

C: They took a big hand in promoting things in the community that was _____(??). They cleaned out all around the mill, beautified it to a certain extent. And built the superintendent's house over there which was a nice house. And they did lots of things. They bought that farm in there. See, they had a farm over there once and raised chickens. _____(??) was a chicken man, we called him. And things like that they developed in the community that helped the image of Avondale compared to what they had had previously. There was nothing in Stevenson Mill prior to the time when they took it but go over there and work ten to twelve hours a day, go home and eat, and come back to work ten to twelve more.

A: Now a lot of this may have happened after you left. I don't know. That's one of the things I regret. I don't know that much about the general economy up here as much as I should. Had the mines already started operation that far back?

C: That's there out here you're speaking of?

A: Yeah. _____(??)

C: Uh, I can't recall again, when I left the mill and the time I _____(??)'45, I don't believe the mines had started.

A: So, at the time that Avondale took over the mill and really got it going, it was pretty much the only industry around of any size, wasn't it.

C: Yeah. We had Chickamauga Cedar here but it was small. Maybe twenty, twenty-five workers at times. Bu other than that, well...

A: So, really, until the steam plant and later Mead came—which hasn't been that long—uh, Avondale was pretty much the only industry in Stevenson.

C: It did a junction between the L & N people live here and quite a few of the Southern. Southern always _____(??)

A: Now, did very many of the people have members of the family working on the railroad, and other family members in the mill?

C: Yeah, quite a few of them.

A: Now, Bragg left after you did, didn't he? From what I can gather, you probably kept your friendship. Did—do you know the particulars of why he left? Did they just want him? Did another—

C: I never did learn any—

A: Yeah. I'd always been interested in that because in almost all of the Avondale Mills, one member of the family is on the local scene. And he had been here, you know.

C: Dick tell you that?

A: It had always interested me that after he left, you know, Lee Bowles pretty much was on the scene and in control, whereas in most places, a member of the family was at the mill.

C: It didn't help the standing of the mill when Bragg left here, because Bragg was concerned about relationship between the mill and the community but Bowles was concerned only about the mill itself.

A: He [Bowles] was probably just centered strictly on the mill.

C: On production.

A: Yeah, unless you can think of any things we haven't covered...

C: I think you've pretty well covered my ten years.

A: I think squeezed quite a bit out of a three or four-year period. One thing that we touched on yesterday that I did want to get some more detail today was the incident in what Hubert was injured. You had mentioned at the time that one of the Russels—who was the guy who was with Hubert at the time who pulled the bead on the rock thrower?

C: When he got injured?

A: Yeah.

C: _____ (??) boy. Parson. I forget his given name. He was a Parson. Fate Parson was the police here at Stevenson and his boy was one of the baseball players and a good one. And probably some of the others of the baseball team. The baseball team usually hung together when they went out through the crowd, too. I wasn't too close to them. I seen it from a distance. Seen the boy that threw the rock and seen it hit Hubert. But I wasn't close enough to them to tell, you know, who was on the ground. It was thrown in the crowd. Hubert was in a crowd.

A: Was it the sort of thing that some of the folks were going to go to the meeting and others were going to stay away from it? Is that what was—

C: No, we had been to the meeting.

A: Oh, going back.

C: And _____ (??) the O's and S's. And, uh, they were up front and we were in the back this fella just comes up out the crowd and picked up a rock and threw it back that the crowd.

A: Well, now, at the time of the meeting itself, did they give Comer any hassle, or was it just after—

C: He had enough respect of the people that they wouldn't hassle him.

A: Yeah.

C: They had a spokesman and he did the talking.

A: Do you recall who that was?

C: No. Every once in a while _____ (??) he'd say something. Usually most of the time, it was Bowles. And it might have been one of the organizers that _____ (??) now I don't know _____ (??)

A: Now, when the mill reopened, did most of the people [who] struck, did they get their jobs back?

C: I can't recall anyone losing their job, but this boy that hit Hubert and there at the office one day they's some words passed between a white man and a colored man and there was a little scuffling _____ (??). They both lost their jobs. But other than that _____ (??) and the feeling in the mill subsided very quickly after everybody went back to work. They had been out of work long enough that they were ready to go back to work. They'd been out so long.

A: Now, you mentioned the words being said between the white and the black man. Were there many blacks who worked out in the yard, or in the mill?

C: Well, they was quite a few of them. I would say that in all, there was twelve, fifteen colored people working down at the mill. You had the men that brought the cotton in the mill _____ (??) and the ones that cleaned up around in the yards; it was twelve or fifteen.

A: And did they take any position whatsoever on the union issue?

C: They were with it _____ (??)

A: Now, like in your family, you worked for a while. How long did Hubert work?

C: I can't remember how long Hubert worked. Hubert was one that _____ (??) He was hard to _____ (??) baseball team. I believe he stayed as long as Bragg did. The team was disorganized after Bragg left the mill and most of them boys baseball. They had to come to the mill and learn the mill part of it. _____ (??) shipping department, places like that, you see. So, they had to pick up a trade and they were just learning to play baseball and...

A: And then J.T. only worked there a year or so.

C: Yeah, he was.

A: No, isn't that rather unusual that—to have that many people in from one family and all of them jst worked a fairly short time?

C: Yes. Usually stayed there.

A: Yeah, that's what I was thinking.

C: Not much turnover. I'd probably have been there 'til I retired if it hadn't been for that squabble.

A: In other words, from what I can gather from having talked earlier about the technical stuff, you really enjoyed the work itself and got into...

C: Mill mathematics and mill work is very interesting to me. If you prepare yourself and stay on top of it, then _____ (??) 'Course, that's the secret of any job, to stay on top of it. Learn your job so _____ (??)

A: Now, that's interesting. I know you later went on these TVA damn building projects.

C: Yeah.

A: And you said you were a machinist with Widow's Creek. Did you pretty much stick with that sort of thing? What was your particular job, for instance?

C: Well, when I went to work for TVA, I had had quite a bit of _____ (??) experience with my daddy and the mill and the saw mill and mill and had worked some on diesel engines and I had a pretty good knowledge of, and I hired in as a Class A helper. TVA had two helpers, Class A and Class B. And I hired in as a Class A helper at seventy-five cents an hour, and pretty soon they began to want me to go on their apprentice program. Well, I felt like I had enough experience with what I picked up at the mill in repair and work like that and I didn't especially want to serve apprenticeship. But they put pressure on me and I took it and I'm glad I did that. And I went on and learned quite a bit about the _____ (??) and different things that they teach in that apprentice thing, so when I got out, they gave me half my time because of the experience I had. I had two years' experience _____ (??). When I got out, I had _____ (??) most folks, but I had shown enough interest and took enough interest in it and learned enough that all the work I would lose was thirty days _____ (??) And I served the rest of my time _____ (??) I didn't have an education for a supervisor because they required a degree.

A: Engineering?

C: Yeah, and I got high as I could go and I just put in my thirty-six years, most of it _____ (??) but I never have regretted it _____ (??) first class _____ (??) they really had some good material and they really _____ (??) if you'd show interest, like I said at the mill, they _____ (??)

A: Well, I thank you for the time. I'll get the official part of it here.

[END OF INTERVIEW]